

RABINDRANATH TAGORE VIEW'S ON MAN AND RELIGION

Dr. B.Srinivasulu
Lecturer in English
V.R.S.Degree College
V.N.PALLI-516321
Kadapa District
Andhra Pradesh

Rabindranath Tagore was brought up in an atmosphere charged completely with religious fervour. His father, Maharshi Devendranth Tagore was one of the religious leaders of those times. The verses of Upanishads were uttered daily in their family. A lesser level man under such circumstances would have accepted the rich religious inheritance and would have led a happy life. But the dynamic mind of Tagore could not be passive receptor of the accepted doctrines. Tagore is a revolutionist and so he begins to believe in his 'own religion' and as almost all his thoughts there will be duality as in his 'own religion' too. He is both rational and irrational. In his own way he starts his argument on religion with its equivalent term in Sanskrit, that is 'Dharma.' He goes on saying in Sadhana, "Dharma which is translated into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language." (Sadhana P.74) He stresses the same and say in the Religion of Man, "In the Sanskrit language, religion goes by the name dharma, which in the derivative meaning implies the principle of relationship that holds us firm, and in the technical sense means the virtue of a thing, the essential quality of it: for instance, heat is the essential quality of fire, though in certain of its stage it may be absent." (The Religion of Man, P-89).

It is the essence and importance of 'dharma' that influences Tagore more when he speaks about 'religion'; he strongly refers to what he means by 'dharma'. He clearly knows that the English term 'religion' does not express the complete meaning that is given by 'dharma' in the Indian tradition. But as there is no better word in English literature, Tagore is compelled to use the term 'Religion' in his English writings to express the true nature of the Sanskrit word 'dharma'. One must be aware of what does this 'dharma' says. This according to Tagore it is one's true nature. Usually one thinks of 'self' in a narrow and partial way. One generally and falsely feels the 'ego' as self, but originally it is far beyond this rigid meaning. By the first sight earth appears to be flat and many people in ancient times believed the same. But after experimental observations the man could know that it is spherical in shape and not at all flat as the ancient man thought. In the same way 'self' is also thought to be the narrow and egoistical one. But when it is observed in totality one sees that its essential reality is not egoistical but far beyond that. If the man travels above the egoistical view, he realizes the real area of self. Here Tagore says, "Within us we have a hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience; it is the undying faith in the infinite in us." (Sadhana, P.51) Actually speaking one's self will be always struggling hard to reveal itself by crossing the obscurity of a narrow vision. So Tagore says with the expression of emotion, "If these were inevitable with in him, he has glimpses of the infinite, which give him assurance that thus truth is not in his limitations."

(Creative Unity, London, Mac Millan 1962, P.75) When a man starts to think in this way, he gets the awareness that he has to travel long to know this. Suddenly he realizes that the real greatness lies in achieving the yet unknown to him. This Tagore explains, “In what to be he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance.” (Sadhana P.153) As soon as the hurdle ‘narrow’ is broken, the state not yet achieved seems to appear and attracts the man. The intensity of the will to reach the yet to reach becomes stronger and prepares him to sacrifice his presents a contrast between what he is and what he ought to be. Therefore Tagore says, “Man’s history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realization of his immortal self- his soul.” (ibid, P33)

Man is never satisfied with what he is and he always in the depths of his being feels the stronger urge to break through the immediate limitations and marches towards the truth of his real self. Thus he searches within and that is called self-realization. The conflict between the appearance and the real being rises to a contradiction. The truth of one’s higher being stirs one’s religious consciousness and creates a faith in him that he is a lot greater than what he appears. To make it clear Tagore says, “Religion has its function in reconciling the contradiction, by subordinating the brute nature to what we consider as the truth of Man.” (The Religion of Man, P 90) So, man seeks the help of religion to clean the darkness created by the basic instincts of ‘self’. In this way man is inspired by the religion and moves on towards the higher level, that level is inward and is beyond the normal limits. At this Tagore says, “He has been building up elaborate religions to convince himself, against his natural inclinations of the paradox that he is not what he is but something greater.” (Ibid P 38) Thus man tries to realize the hidden truth in him. Therefore religion is never a passive acceptance but an active effort towards realization of one self. Tagore says, “Consists in the endeavour of men to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of man the eternal and have faith in him.” (Ibid P.89) The religion gives strength to man’s faith in the nature of his ideal. By solving the contract between individual self and universal self, religion takes man to a new height and that arena will be free from all contradictions and gives man liberty to travel since he becomes ‘religious’, man than, “Finds his meaning in the fundamental reality comprehending all individuals – the reality which is the moral and spiritual basis of the realm of human values..... religion is the liberation of our individual personality in the universal person.” (Ibid P.120) Thus religion widens one’s vision and highlights his human values and makes him understand the basic truth of religion.

Thus ‘religion’ which frees man from the ignorance of his true-self, leads him to the consciousness of a transcendental spiritual unity. This consciousness gives rise to awareness of a unity whose basic nature is spiritual and which shows him the truth beyond the facts of his immediate experience. The beyond, though outside man’s immediate possessions is never un-human. Here Tagore accepts Adharvaveda which says, “One aspect of Man’s self is seen directly here, but the other is the vast unseen.” (Man P.24) So the vast unseen also an aspect of man’s self. Truly speaking Tagore doesn’t believe any of the realistic beyond the human truth. He says, “The ultimate truth for us is human truth, and that is why this world we know is necessarily a human world. Even if there is any other beside this, it is non-existent for us, not only for today, but forever.”(Ibid P.42) Tagore believes that religion is predominantly spiritual. Truly the spiritual has a human aspect, which is important for religion. Even though one receives only faint indications of the spiritual from within in the frontiers of the physical existence, Tagore says that one seems to have a stronger faith in the spiritual life than in the physical. The great soul who understands completely the comprehensive spirit within and without him, this spirit is dearer than all else. Here Tagore quotes approving the ancient saying, “He is dearer than son, dearer

than wealth, and dearer than all else is this spirit who is in our innermost heart.” (Ibid P.39) Tagore is one of the opinions that man’s soul is bound to win its prosperity through spiritual life and all great religious of men are directed towards this great end.

Tagore repeatedly stresses the principle of unity as the most fundamental in the mystery of existence. He says, “It is some untold mystery of unity in me that has the simplicity of the infinite and reduces the immense mass of multitude to a single point.” (Creative Unity, Introduction-iii) He extends his saying and says, “The quality of the infinite is not the magnitude of extension, it is in the ‘Advitam’, the mystery of unity. Facts occupy endless time and space; but the truth comprehending them all has no dimension; it is one. Wherever our heart touches the one, in the small or the big it finds the touch of the infinite.” (Ibid P.iv) The evolution of the world on the physical level too reveals an urge for achieving an ever-higher unity. The realization of this unity, according to Tagore, it is very essential for man’s emancipation. Most of the times the wrong views of the finality of multiplicity of things drive him away from truth. Such a view only lures him to gather variety of external possessions and denys the joy of the realization of the real unity. He also says that this realization of unity provides him with the key to unlock the truth of his spiritual life. So Tagore says, “Through all the diversities of the world, the one in us is threading its course towards the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy.” (Personality, P.86) So in the realization of unity only lies man’s joy. Tagore wants to finalize this and says, “We must know that, as, through science and commerce, the realization of the unity of the material world gives us power, but the realization of the great spiritual unity of man alone can give us peace.”(Creative Unity, P.130)

More than this ‘comprehensive spirit of unity’ the religious consciousness of man has a divine character and this religious man expresses his “reverential loyalty” of this awareness of unity. So religion, as Tagore tells, transforms one’s vision inward and there he sees glimpse, his unity with the infinite. In the middle of practical world with all physical needs and temptation of modernism, this religion gives one the needed vision of unity. So, Tagore remarks, “Our religions present for us the dreams of the ideal unity.” (The Religion of Man, P. 77 & 89) This unity as per Tagore ‘is not a mere subjective ideal but an emerging truth. Whatever the name of the religion Tagore emphatically says, “The consciousness of this unity is spiritual, and our effort to be true to it is our religion.” (Ibid, P.10)

What Tagore wants to tell about man is quite simple but his arena is very wider. The start of religious consciousness provided man with a great evolution in the moral and spiritual aspects of man. The primitive level of understanding of religion didn’t enable our forefather to know the truth of the ideal religion. But the urge to realize the fuller meaning of the ideal religion laid path for a process of gradual evolution. It guided man to look in himself for the truth of religion. He gradually begins to learn that the cult of power and greed is not the real meaning of religious. Tagore in his own words says, “Through it all there must have been some current of deeper desire, which constantly contradicted the cult of power and indicated worlds of inner good, infinitely more precious there material gain. Its voice was not strong at first nor was it headed by the majority of people; but its influences, like the life within the seed, were silently working.” (The Religion of Man, P.50-51) At first man was mainly concerned with maintaining his life by making a sort of adjustment with the physical world and hence, “The first expression of his religion was physical.” (Ibid, P.46) Therefore his duties were the physical forces of nature and his worship was to in over these forces for his personal benefit. But when he found time to look into the inner reality, “The mystery of his own personality gained for him its highest importance.” (Ibid, P.46) This gave him chance to proceed in the direction of man’s religion. He

began to know that the truth of ideal religion doesn't lay anywhere outside his self, but within him. It changed the entire way of his worship. The older ways of magic and blind rites were forgotten and man approached the right path of considering the higher spirituality. In Tagore's words, "Its evolution has been from the external and magical towards the inner as well as moral and spiritual significance." (Ibid P.41)

Tagore treats man as a bearer of a great dignity to the earth. Tagore never believes that Srikrishna, Shankaracharya, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mahammad etc as avatharas in popular sense. Most of the religious people believe that avatharas are God in human form. Generally people attribute super-natural qualities to these religious men and come to the opinion that God himself takes his birth in this world to set it right. When there is inhumanity spread everywhere in the world and sinners dominant God takes birth to establish peace in the world once again. This is the general belief that many religious too believe. But Tagore solely contradicts this idea and reveals that all the above said are perfect men. This employs that according to Tagore avatars means great men. Avatara is a permanent link and mediator between man and God. Great men are they who remind one of one's greatness. Man, due to ignorance sometimes because of his lower self, forgets the real nature of him. These great men come to remind man of the divine origin and to remind him that he is immortal. These great men do not invent any new method, do not preach any new theory but they awake one's mind, they tell one to rise above one's narrow self. With the light of their heart great men remove the darkness of ignorance from man. They teach one that man is above all narrowness, customs and creeds which make man not only small but also they limit God too who actually dwells in all human hearts alike. So according to Tagore all great men are those who have developed in themselves all human qualities in best way, they never cease to be human, but become perfect men. Thus Tagore doesn't accept that great men are God on the contrary he says that they are the path showers for attaining highest human ideal.

The ultimate destiny or goal of human beings is get freedom or liberty. But Tagore's freedom differs in many ways from the traditional concept of freedom. According to him freedom consists in the realization of spirit within man and within the whole universe. Man will be capable of attaining freedom not by performing ceremonies but by rising above the ego and by uniting oneself with the whole universe. Man can achieve freedom by eradicating ignorance which is negative and developing the positive quality of love in himself. He has to develop moral and spiritual aspects in himself to get divinity in him which is said to be the real freedom. To attain this he has to pass through pain, suffering and death. Until man identifies himself in his surroundings, he forgets that to live is to grow out of himself. When he understands this, he doesn't bother about death at all. Man realizes that death opens gates for greater and wider life. Tagore points out that the history of man is not a record of aimless events. Tagore says that man is infinite in strength, love, sense of purity and goodness. There is a purpose for man's life. Tagore compares man's life with 'lotus'. Through many births, surpassing many evils and sufferings the life of man unfolds its petals one after the other like a 'lotus'. Life of each individual proceeds towards its full expression. And thus the history of the universal man is connected with the development of individual man. In this way Tagore says that man collecting and developing his inner strength birth by birth finally tries to become equal to God too. Thus Tagore as he does in all his works gives priority a lot to 'humanism'. So for Tagore, man is everything and omnipotent.

References:-

1. Sisir Kumar Das (ed), “The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore”, New Delhi, Sahitya Academi, Vol – II, 1931.
2. Sisir Kumar Das (ed), “The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore”, New Delhi, Sahitya Academi, Vol – III, 1931.